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The Politics Of Consensus: Quadhafi's Libyan Quest

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After a period of more than ten years of rule by the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), Libyan developments lend themselves to evaluation in several respects—economic modernization and development, international oil policy (OPEC and OAPEC), intra-Arab bloc politics, pan-movement activities (Arabism and Islamism), third world relationships (including liberation movements' support), and internal political development. The least understood and analyzed aspect has been Libyan internal political development, its political philosophical underpinnings and the actual growth pattern of political institutions. This essay focusses on the latter aspect of Libyan society because of the dearth of available knowledge and perception, as well as its much broader implications for political evolution in the Arab/Islamic world. Structurally, the presentation unfolds in three steps: 1) the cultural/intellectual influences and other factors determining political developments; 2) the philosophical concepts and internal political institutional developments; and 3) an evaluation of the decade of political development, including its implications and ramifications.

The Cultural/Intellectual Influences

An understanding of these influences must begin with the pre-revolutionary period. The monarch, King Idris, reflected the continued influence of the Sanussi Brotherhood, a puritanical and mystical movement with over 100 years of historical roots in Libya, particularly Cyrenaica (Eastern province). The founder of the movement, Mohammad Ibn Ali as-Sanussi was Algerian by birth (1790) and traced his descent from the Prophet himself through his daughter Fatima. His pilgrimage to Mecca and several religious ventures in the Arabian peninsula, also at al-Azhar University in Cario, were preliminary stages prior to his settlement in Cyrenaica. The first "lodge" of the Brotherhood was set up shortly thereafter and was the beginning of a significantly new religious order within Islam. At its peak, it is estimated that two million "brothers" were enrolled in the Sanussi Order. Despite their growing success, other reformist (purist) movements rejected working with them, i.e., Arabia, Sudan, Egypt.
Aside from the influential dissemination of a revived Islam in Cyrenaica and other areas of the Islamic world, the founder and his son, al-Mahdi, developed a facility for working with the bedouin and tribal groups in the region, transcending their primitive social order and rigid divisions. The Order would not have been successful had it failed to preserve and benefit these traditional people. Fortunately, about 70 years passed before the people and geography were subjected to any alternative challenge (influence), European imperialism led by the Italian invasion of Tripoli in 1911. Analogous to the Wahhabiyyah in the Arabian peninsula, a historical and physical distance from the mainstream of western ideas and power, permitted pristine piety to become imbedded as the basic value system, especially a stress on return to classical Islamic Law. The Sanussi Order has been viewed as the reform movement closest to orthodox Islam. Ultimately accepted throughout Libya, it was most influential among the Cyrenaicans led by the King.

With a strong Islamic revivalist organization and heritage, it is not surprising that the indigenous population began a concerted effort at resistance to foreign rule, cooperating with the Turks against the Italians, as a way of confronting the contradictory influences. Virtually from the beginning of the Italian entre, a guerrilla war ensued, the primitive tribesmen aided initially by Turkish officers and during World War One additionally by the Germans and the Austrians. Although apparently victorious, the Italians after the war decided to end all opposition in Libya. The brutal and destructive colonial war, 1921–1932, was made even more vicious by the rise and triumph of fascism in Italy, with its gross contempt and inhumanity for the local populace. The ramifications of the suffering tribesmen not only reinforced their overall sentiment against foreign rule, but produced an interpretation of the West as evil and personifying a clash along contradictory civilization lines.

Anti-foreign rule was further hardened by the calculated efforts at Italian colonization and displacement in the remainder of the inter-war period. When World War Two erupted, the Sanussi leadership chose to support the Allied side against the Italians. Despite the defeat of the Italians, post-war efforts for the resolution of the future of Libya foundered in the political differences among the victorious Great Powers. Libya underwent a disjoined and disoriented six years of haggling even though the populace expressed a distinct desire for independence. In a fit of frustration and with a sense of futility, Libya was finally granted independence by the Political Committee of the United Nations General Assembly in 1951 (to take effect in 1952). King Idris as-Sanussi was proclaimed ruler of a United Kingdom of Libya, reflecting the merger of Islamic and anti-foreign rule sentiments.

Given thirty years of war, repression and deprivation, it is not surprising that little economic or political infrastructure existed to permit a functioning new state. The King and his royal household, with great affinity in the Cyrenaica region, represented an imposition of authority on the western
and southern provinces of Tripolitania and Fezzan. These regional and
tribal animosities had been strongly encouraged by the Italians during their
rule. Thus, while anti-foreign rule served as a continuous basis of unified
opposition to the Italians, upon attainment of independence, the internal
divisions of a traditionally poor and backward society came to the
forefront. Given the circumstances of a new and vacuous society, the only
available basic influence was traditional Islam, and this force had not served
to generate the modern concept of a nation.

Islamic fundamentalism and Arab nationalism merged in the 1950’s
and 1960’s in the form of a group of young Libyan army officers (junta)
subsequently led in their 1969 coup by a 27-year-old Captain, Muammar al­
Quadhafi. Confronted by the intrusion of new foreign elements, largely
represented by the United States direct and indirect role in the country, the
conspirators turned their objections against the regime of King Idris. 1959
saw the modest beginnings of western oil discoveries and the increased
intrusions of the private petroleum companies. The United States Govern­
ment’s direct presence was discernible via the NATO air force training com­
mand operations at Wheelus Field outside Tripoli. The training of and im­
pact America had on Libyan personnel both at Wheelus and in the United
States, only fanned their envy and discontent against the more primitive and
backward way of life under the monarchy. Eventually this intensified and
accelerated the coup attempt.

In the first surge of independence euphoria, the people rallied around
the monarchy. From 1963 to 1969, instability became a constant condition.
The breakdown reflected the internal tensions between the three major
regions and their populations’ different orientations (tribal and parochial),
governmental crises at the top levels reflecting these discrepancies and
failures at true consolidation, and finally, the new perspectives and percep­
tions of elite elements reacting against the intrusions of foreign ideas and in­
fluences. The combination of these factors, plus the neighboring influence
of Nasserism, produced the impetus for revolutionary action and the
recognition that an alternative organizational system was possible. The
political sociology and social psychology of revolutionary dynamics,
especially in terms of the military’s role, has been effectively summarized
elsewhere, and needs no repeating in the Libyan case.

The second major intellectual influence on Libyan political develop­
ment was Nasserism, the force of the man’s ideas and his revolutionary
acts. The study of the Libyan evolution before and since its own coup is a
major testimonial to the profound impact that the first great Arab/Islamic
post-World War Two coup (1952) had upon the whole region. Quadhafi, as
a youngster and as a junior officer, lived through the explosive and roman­
tic period of Nasserism unleashed in the Middle East and around the world.
Conveniently from a background of a bedouin family removed from the
leading and competing tribes or families, geographically Sirte located be­
tween Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, he was uncommitted to the divisional
patterns of Libyan society. Nasserism was attractive to him as the new energizing and revival force of Arabism and Islam, especially under Nasser's leadership.

Given this nearly total commitment to Nasserism, the analogy (with Egypt’s Farouk) of opposition to a corrupt monarchy was easily arrived at, and a recognition of the pervasiveness of Nasser’s pan-Arab ideas upon urban Libyan elites was readily perceived by the young military officers. The activism of Nasser in rallying the Arab world to pan-Arabism by stressing the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1964 on strongly impacted Quadhafi. The popular and direct appeals to Libya by the heroic figure of Nasser, especially for expulsion of foreign elements, reenforced Quadhafi’s orientation and further undercut the monarchy because of its continuing relations with the West.

Nasserism dictated an “eastern orientation” for Libya (as it did for the Algerian revolution). The guiding principles of the revolution as first enunciated reflected Nasserist influence—anit-foreign oppression, a marriage of socialism and Islam, and a pan-Arab unity of their world (including Palestine). The Nasserist (Egyptian) model was in evidence immediately after the coup as evidenced by a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and a formal government comprised of both civilians and some military personnel. The General Neguib (Egyptian) pattern of a “revolutionary front man” of higher rank and traditional connections was apparent in the persons of the Defense Minister (Adan al-Hawwaz) and the Interior Minister (Musa Ahmak). As prominent Cyrenaicans, they served to legitimatize the coup, and as in the Egyptian model, both were dismissed soon afterwards (December, 1969) to clarify the true power base of the revolutionary leadership. The preeminence of an outrightly military regime after the initial fallouts and consolidation efforts followed the Egyptian pattern almost literally.

All the initial policies implemented by the RCC and the government reflected the twin influences of Islamic fundamentalism and Nasserism. Domestically, Quadhafi imposed a “puritanical” Islam. Alcohol was prohibited (even at foreign embassies for a time), liquor-serving establishments (including night clubs) were closed down, the Arabic language took over completely in the every day lifestyle, and all evidences of the colonial past were set upon to be eradicated.

In Quadhafi’s external policies, Nasserism became the paramount guiding principles. Foreign bases run by Britain and the United States were closed down and their personnel forced to leave. The anti-foreigner nationalism also invoked some positive forms expressed by Nasser’s influence: 1) subsidization of the Palestinian guerrilla organization most popular at the time, al-Fatah, and 2) pan-Arabic nationalistic unity vis-a-vis the Maghreb states (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco), and 3) support for Egypt as the true center for the total unification of all Arab states. When the Maghreb scheme failed, it was Nasser who proved his and Egypt’s worth by
signing the Tripoli Charter, the tripartite agreement including Sudan as well. Conceivably the Quadhafi acquiescence in Egypt's leading role would have persisted had not Nasser died in 1970. Legitimate speculation then ensued that Quadhafi felt he had inherited Nasser's leadership mantle. 19 It is also possible to speculate that Quadhafi may have been willing to accept the continuing central role of Egypt, but that Sadat, as well as other Arab-world leaders simply rejected or relegated his euphoric pan-Arabism/Islamism to a more limited and realistic level of importance. Certainly the number of confrontations that subsequently took place between Quadhafi and leaders from Morocco to Syria 20 could well sustain his belief there was only one logical successor to Nasser given these circumstances. The difference could be a matter of a self-ordained adulation versus a reactive no alternative motivation.

The full extent of Nasser's influence will become even more apparent when detailing the conceptual views specifically implemented in institutional forms in the post-revolutionary dynamics.

The Resource (Oil) Factor as an Influence

What may have appeared to be an unrelated factor actually became a crucial influence on the evolution of the Libyan political system. Oil became a dynamic variable at its point of introduction into Libyan society in 1959. 21 Once the spigot was turned on, Libya became one of the world's leading oil-producers. In 1969 Libya's exports rivalled Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The RCC and Quadhafi's popularity were easily sustainable because of this "vast and increasing wealth." 22 It certainly turned out to be easier for Quadhafi to lead a previously impoverished society, small in population, regularly exposed to an increasing capability and distribution of new and more wealth, 23 to accept his experimentation with variations in political systems and institutions. This type of scenario, plenifullness of resources versus small population pressure upon them, has been rare in history. However, in the post-World War Two period the world public has been exposed to a number of these unique historical examples, especially in the Middle East region (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, etc.).

* Oil revenues jumped from 1.6 billion dollars in 1972 to 8.6 billion dollars in 1978.

External Left Radicalism as an Influence

With the failures of Egyptian and/or Maghreb unification efforts, and subsequent formal and informal opposition from these same sources, a strong case can be made for Quadhafi's (Libya's) assertiveness as the leader of the Arab/Islamic bloc and as a leader of Third World "causes" in his own right. Given the tremendous accumulation of oil monies, access and purchase of military hardware and other technologies, including nuclear,
became feasible objectives.\textsuperscript{23a} Thus the Nasserist and radical Islam visions were not dependent upon the central role of Quadhafi’s policies. A turn to the USSR for armaments reflected the latter’s support of Quadhafi’s radical behavior rather than the reverse, a commitment by Libya’s leader to Marxism. But the Soviet Union had become an important factor in supporting and consolidating the assumed validity of belief and action of the highly ideological Quadhafi. Quadhafi even deduced from Soviet external policies the opportunity of becoming an Afro-Arab Castro that would have grave implications for two continents and internal aspects of Libyan behavior (training and exporting terrorists in support of Nasserist/Islamic fundamentalist goals).\textsuperscript{23b}

The other radical influence that came from abroad seems pretty self-evident, the Chinese internal mobilization model connected with Mao’s “cultural revolution” of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. The timing was appropriate. So much of the popular mobilization efforts in Libya reflect similarities with the Chinese activities as will be evident in this essay’s description and analysis of the current stage of Libya’s political institutionalization, The Direct Authority of the People. It is surely no accident that Quadhafi appeared on the scene with \textit{The Green Books}, analogous to Mao’s \textit{Red Book}, and the terminology of “popular (cultural) revolution.” The simplistic nature of the respective books—sayings, wisdoms, homilies—evidences a definite correlation of circumstances and choices.

The Evolution of Quadhafi’s Libyan Political System

Institutionally, the Libyan revolution over an abbreviated period of four post-years ran the course of three stages. The September to December, 1969 period was the “consolidation stage” and ended with the elimination of a countercoup. Another way of characterizing this stage is the “power clarification stage.” The second stage saw the RCC assert itself by taking over the actual government for the period of January, 1970 to July, 1971. Quadhafi’s leadership was most evident and pronounced as he assumed the Prime Ministership and Defense Ministry. The third brief stage, from August, 1971 to April, 1973 reflected a withdrawal tendency by the military junta members from formal governmental positions. For Quadhafi himself, the process was confirmed a year later (April, 1974) when the RCC decreed that he was thereafter to devote himself to the twin tasks of ideology and institution-building among the Libyan masses.\textsuperscript{24} Paralleling Nasser’s behavior, he was to formulate and systematize a political and social philosophy and implement it by concrete institutional efforts.

Despite some contrary evidences of friction and dissent in the post-revolutionary period, the centrality of Quadhafi’s preeminence as leader was and is accepted both within and external to Libyan society. Following his reassignment in April, 1974 to “organizational and ideological action,”\textsuperscript{26} there has been no dispute that Libyan political evolution can best be described and explained in terms of Quadhafi. However, it would be misleading to assume Quadhafi’s systematic conceptualization first began
with this date and circumstance.

As a revolutionary, Qadhafi was aware of the need to establish an ideological basis not only for legitimizing new rule but also to serve as an integrative/unification device and as a guide for the future development of the society. At the earliest moment and in superficial fashion, Qadhafi coopted Nasserism as his ideology, especially that part of the model that called for widespread (mass) public participation via a comparable political organization. This became evident with the Libyan adoption of the Egyptian Arab Socialist Union in June, 1971 as the participation/organizational model for their own society. This act was really the second act by the revolutionary leadership in the centralization of their power while conveying the impression of public participation. In September, 1970, the Popular Resistance Movement was created to strengthen the regime against internal threats and win popular support for such efforts. But the key centerpiece to reflect Qadhafi’s political philosophy and institutional efforts remained the Arab Socialist Union. Founded in 1971, it held its opening Congress in March, 1972, and could be labelled finished by April, 1973.

The Arab Socialist Union (ASU)

Whereas Nasser introduced the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) ten years after his officer coup, Qadhafi moved to coopt and impose the organization on Libya three years after attaining power (1971) and nine years after Nasser’s experience. The outward table of organization was virtually identical from one society to another. Ideologically the objectives seemed to be the same—Arab socialism, Arab unity and positive non-alignment in external relations. The broad expectations were to attain democracy by the people, a socialist revolution of the working people, and to protect the public guarantees provided by the National Charter. The guarantees were to be sustained by assuring at least 50% representation in the ASU by workers and farmers, labelled the overwhelming majority of the population. The ASU was recognized as the socialist vanguard that would both lead the people, express their will, and direct national action and progress in terms of the people’s demands and needs. Representation was structured in pyramidal fashion based on both geographic distribution of the populace and economic and social sector interest groups in the society. The most basic units were set up at city, village or village-equivalent levels (factories, schools, businesses, etc.). Next came 25 district (governates) level units, supplementing and complementing the basic units. At the top of the national pyramid was the National Congress of the ASU and the Central Committee, which designated the Higher Executive Committee, the apex of the system. Significantly, membership was open to all citizenry save for “feudalists” and “exploitative capitalists,” both ideological categories.

Libya under Qadhafi made some modifications in the cooption because of some fundamental differences in the respective societies and due
to Quadhafi's political philosophy. Because of his commitment to Islamic fundamentalism (certainly more consistent with a traditional and tribal society found in Libya), Quadhafi couched ASU objectives in terms of Islam as a universal religion and simultaneously as a political ideology. Certainly Nasserism inferred this too, but Quadhafi went much further. He stressed the antithesis between Islam and communism. In a novel twist, Quadhafi insisted that Islam was the basis for both Arab socialism and politics. He sought to persuade Libyan masses that Islam was revolutionary because it was the first religion to proclaim socialism (in contradiction of Christian data to the contrary). The follow through reasoning claimed that the ASU was socialist because of its demand for social justice among the people based on “Sharia.” Arab socialism meant self-sufficiency in production and cooperation between the private and public sectors. To him religious consciousness and conviction were in no way contradictory with engaging in and stressing socialist politics. Most pointedly Quadhafi argued that the Libyan version of the ASU was built on the firm basis of Arabism and Islam. There was no justification whatever for Libyans (and by inference all other Arab/Islamic peoples) to choose strictly between Marxism or capitalist ideologies since Islam could solve all the problems within their society.

The ASU was viewed as a framework for political participation and social mobilization. Quadhafi assumed the ASU would substitute for the tribal system and bridge the gap between the governmental leadership and the masses. As he understood it, the apparatus would facilitate a controlled, popular involvement in a “meaningful manner.” But Quadhafi's conceptualization of the ASU went beyond merely creating an institutional structure. For him, the ASU was the means by which the military revolution could become a truly popular revolution. He was quoted at one point as saying “It was the responsibility of the people to take the military revolution and transform it into a popular revolution which will include all of the masses.” If the ASU failed in these various objectives then the revolution might fail and the goal of democratization (to be read consensus) might never take place.

ASU also reflected another aspect of Quadhafi’s political conceptualizing. It was sanctioned as the only legal political organization, all other political activities adjudged to be treasonable. The penalty for other activities was death. The RCC objected to such devices as political parties as potentially divisive forces that would hinder the ultimate unification (consensus) and modernization of the country. Quadhafi himself argued that their effect was to weaken the country, create confusion, and interfere with the people's right to govern themselves. Partisanship was repeatedly characterized as "fake parliamentarianism" and "paper constitutionalism." What was needed was a period of political, economic and social regimentation in order to achieve the basic conditions for "true democracy"—social and economic equality, higher production and a higher
What realistically occurred was the ASU's legitimization of the RCC and Quadhafi's rule in Libya in the name of the people. The ASU became essentially a mobilization device for the leadership whenever it needed to rally support. A good example was Quadhafi's effort (a la Nasser) to resign the RCC leadership in late 1973, accused the masses of not being revolutionary enough to achieve the necessary progression he sought. Huge urban demonstrations were organized by the ASU to ask Quadhafi to reconsider and remain at the leadership helm. No better evidence could be provided that the man was the embodiment and symbol of the revolution. It was a classic calculated test of the leader's popularity and the efficiency of the ASU organizational abilities to produce specific results. Of course he stayed on.

The ASU also failed to become a popular participatory political vehicle because of its broad membership. It assumed a need for an imposed unanimity on the membership while acknowledging the underlying fragmented nature of the tribal society as a causal motivation in creating the new superstructure. Even socio-economic interest sectors could be in disagreement, assuming all were really represented, but this was rejected by the RCC leadership as partisan and divisive politics.

Even more damaging to the prospects of the ASU success was its paralleling the administrative and political machinery already represented by the existing government and RCC leadership. It was all too evident that the RCC and Quadhafi had completely coopted and dominated from above the ASU committees, preventing them from developing a dynamic quality all their own. Urban intellectuals developed a negative preconception of the ASU even before it was installed in Libya, secure in the knowledge that its counterpart had already failed in Egypt. Ironically, another reason for its failure was the general public's inability to comprehend the ASU structure and its workings. Furthermore, like all organizational situations, there was a lack of coordination between the leadership bureaucracy and the ASU. Finally, the real politics of Libya were subsumed under and explained by Quadhafi's personal role. Much like his hero, Nasser, virtually every controversy required his intervention, especially where his charismatic image was influential with the rural population.

Popular (Cultural) Revolution

The ultimate judgment on the failure of the ASU came from Quadhafi himself, especially the fulfillment of the goal of transforming itself into a popular revolution. Perhaps the telling moment had come before 1973 with the death of Nasser, his primary inspiration and the lost partner with whom Libya expected to integrate (Sadat turned out to be unresponsive). However, instead of reading finality to the ASU, Quadhafi let it linger on.
Instead he turned his attention to what he considered the underlying substantive conditions that precluded institutional success. In April 1973 he proclaimed a “popular and cultural revolution” to be carried out via People’s Committees. It was intended to shake up the entire traditional tribal structure and facilitate “a leap forward” in economic and political development. It was clearly an attempt to produce an outburst of revolutionary sentiment tied to Islamic fundamentalism. 43

A five-point reform program was instituted: 1) the suspension of existing laws and promulgation of new ones; 2) the implementation of Islamic thought; 3) distribution of arms to loyal citizens; 4) the purging of political deviationists, especially those identified with the communist and capitalist alternatives; and 5) a campaign against bureaucratic inefficiency. 44

According to Quadhafi, traditional institutions and customs remained as obstacles to rapid rates of development. 45 But the overriding political philosophy of popular participation, democratization (consensus-building), also governed this new thrust. The “popular committees” would permit the masses to seize power and would involve them in the running of their own affairs. Every sector of society would be impacted so that an expanded participation would take place and local decision-making would be enhanced. Consistent with this concept, the RCC passed Law No. 78 insisting that the administrative responsibilities of the People’s Committees would make them instruments of the popular “general will.” Municipal governments were replaced by these Committees, their chairmen taking over the functions of local mayors. 46 The Committee concept was additionally expected to unleash new, young and modernizing leaders more responsive to Quadhafi’s revolutionary perceptions and conceptualizations. 47

As part of the programatic focus on Islamic thought, Quadhafi made the “Third Way” official doctrine. This was the formalization of his belief that a new outlook favorable to Islam was necessary, because in his judgment both communism and capitalism had failed. 48 As previously noted, his Third Way was based on religion (Islam) and nationalism (Arabism), the basic motives in history. 49

What had the appearances of possible anarchy because of the sanctioned activities did not occur. The regime carefully avoided the creation of “popular committees” in the governmental apparatus. 50 The popular revolution was intended only for the masses.

If the new dynamic was intended as a device for instigating Arab/Islamic integration, particularly with Egypt under Sadat, it failed again on this count. The expected merger by September 1973 collapsed as Quadhafi’s lecturing of Egyptian society about its immorality and corruption by Islamic standards backfired. Sensing a failure, Quadhafi ordered a mass march on Egypt to force Sadat’s hand. Sadat reacted firmly by stopping the march and asserting Egypt would not be bullied into a union. 51

The most widely accepted interpretation of this failed transference revolves around a politico-military strategy that was being pursued by
Egypt's Sadat. Having made the decision to go to war with Israel, Sadat redirected his geo-political orientation away from Libya eastward to an alliance with Syria and Saudi Arabia (a regime never overly sympathetic to Quadhafi's version of Islam). The defeating blow to Quadhafi's aspirations was the Egyptian failure to include, inform or consult him on the decision to war against the Israelis.\(^{52}\)

The Direct Authority of the People (DAOP)

The "popular revolution" had little prospects for success if the People's Committees lacked an overriding formal framework to sustain the direction and continuity of change in Libya. On March 2, 1977, the government announced its most radical innovation of popular participation and mass influence—the Direct Authority of the People (DAOP). This step took place after extensive discussion and debates by newly elected delegates from around the nation and the military leadership at a meeting in Sabha, the largest community in southern Libya.\(^{53}\) Located away from the traditional coastal centers of power and controversy certainly facilitated the decision-making and the actual decision.

The political experiment brought with it a renaming of the state, hereafter referred to as the "Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya,"\(^{54}\) and the introduction of a new institutional pyramid capped by the all-powerful General People's Congress.\(^{55}\) The DAOP replaced all previous political institutions with the abolition of the RCC and the ASU. As the only remaining legitimate political structure, it still made the specific gesture of incorporating the "cultural revolution's" People's Committees into the new arrangement. Philosophically Quadhafi viewed the newest step as a further progression in popular rule and the public's participation in self-governance. It might well be labelled in western terms "a direct democracy system," save for the fact that Quadhafi equated democracy with a dictatorial system and envisioned the continuity of a sensitive revolutionary leader (himself) as part of the setup.\(^{56}\) The clarification of this apparent confusion requires contrasting the republican, representative/legislative systems as the condemned evil democracy and the mass (popular) and direct rule system announced as something very different. Quadhafi had contended earlier that the era of "republics had gone and the era of masses must prevail."\(^{57}\) In a justifying philosophical sense Quadhafi also wrote:

... any system of government other than popular Congresses is undemocratic. All the prevailing systems of government in the world today are undemocratic unless they adopt this method. Popular Congresses are the end of the journey of the masses' movement in its quest for democracy. ... Direct democracy is the ideal method, which, if realized in practice, is indisputable and noncontroversial.\(^{58}\)

As part of the deliberate effort to explain the new political system to the people and to justify it, the regime also said:
Direct People's Authority shall be the basis of the political system in the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Authority is the peoples and none else. The people exercise authority through the People's Congress, People's Committees, Trade Unions, Professional Associations, and the General People's Congress.59

The total table of organization and chart of responsibility is found in the accompanying flow chart (p. 20). The General People's Congress (GPC or national Congress) was supposedly the embodiment of the national masses integrated at the apex of a pyramid of power.60 However, an executive leadership function appeared above the GPC in various forms. There was a General Secretariat for the GPC consisting of five former RCC members, a General Secretary (Quadhafi), and the replacement for The Council of Ministers (the cabinet) by a General People’s Committee, composed of 26 secretaries (ministers). All of the latter people were civilians except for the Interior post, which was headed by a former police officer. The functions of the General People’s Committee, as explained by the DAOP, was to execute general policy and supervise the People’s Committees at the municipal level. Theoretically, this institution was responsible to the GPC, inferring ultimately the lowest grass-roots agencies called the Basic Popular Congresses. The selection by the GPC of the initial executive leadership took place at its first meeting in March 1977.

Reversing the order of the power pyramid, bottom upward, the public entered the institutional process primarily through the Basic Popular Congress (BPC). If decentralization and local governance were to be a truly established fact, it was to be exemplified by this unit. The BPC was assigned a wide range of activities that elevated them beyond a mere state instrument for public mobilization and control.61

**THE DIRECT AUTHORITY OF THE PEOPLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Secretary of the G.P.C. (Quadhafi)</th>
<th>Presidents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Secretariat of the G.P.C. (5 members)</td>
<td>Professional Unions (Non-Voting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The General Peoples Higher Committee (Cabinet—26 Members)</td>
<td>Professional Unions, (students, workers, doctors, lawyers, taxi drivers, farmers, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture, Etc. (Consultative Role)</td>
<td>People’s Committee Municipal Level (About 10 Members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Committee (20 Members)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Economic Committee

The General People's Congress (GPC)
178 Mahallat Delegates
(One Vote)
(Roughly 1,000 Members)

Basic Popular Congresses
(178 Mahallats-Zones)
(Range of 6-30,000
Citizens Represented)

The People

For purposes of decentralization, the nation was divided into 178 BPC territorial units with a population range between 6-30,000 citizens. In turn the BPC was subdivided into Mahallat (administrative zones analogous to counties). These units were deliberately designed to cut across former tribal boundaries, compelling the different tribes to deal with each other, and as part of the effort to destroy the traditional and regional kinship/loyalty networks. Each mahalla chose two members to represent it in the "political committee" of the BPC over a three-year term. The "political committee," made up of about 20 such delegates, was considered the most influential and significant of all the functional committees of the BPC. The "political committee" operated via a secretary (general type) and vice secretary and covered all administrative matters under the BPC's jurisdiction. These matters included relations with and links between the national Congress and the General People's Committee (the ministries). In the national Congress relationship, the "political committee" was expected to convey constituency concerns and opinions. Additionally, the "political committee" was to oversee daily political activities (clearly support mobilization and scrutiny functions), and to keep a supervisory eye on the People Committees (see below).

A comparable "economic committee" was also constituted to parallel the "political committees" of the BPC's. Lacking much in the way of members with the necessary technical skills to suggest policies or review them, they turned out very insignificant to the workings of the new system.

The People's Committees were the equivalent of local governments. In combination with the "political committee" delegation to the national Congress, they too took on a representative function for their region at that same body.

*pp. 16-17, supra.
Size of the delegation in no way reflected influence at the national Congress as each had only one vote. Because the People's Committees were tantamount to local government, members, ten in number, serving three-year terms, were expected to have technical skills and expertise (based primarily on education) to deal with some very specific problems and needs. Again, an executive was to be chosen from among themselves, this person labelled a chairman (equivalent to mayor). Because the previous public sector corporations, factories and other institutions had their own governance system, the People's Committees superseded them and took over their functions. Thus, the committee system meant a primacy of control and concern with economic affairs in contrast with the BPC's and their "political committee" stress. It was assumed that under the new political system these People's Committees would become the "change agents" for the Libyan revolution, especially reflecting downward the governing power over the people and upward the local conditions that varied somewhat from place-to-place.

Paralleling this pyramidal structure and yet part of it, was the insistence on interest group participation and representation. Each profession and occupation was expected to form its own Professional Union to articulate and defend its interests. This included every employed citizen that had to join a union (doctors, lawyers, farmers, students, workers, professors, taxi drivers, etc.) except for the military and the police force. Unions had informal representation at the national Congress via their presidents, but in a non-voting capacity. Other governmental economic interest groups (Chambers of Commerce and Industry, etc.) also partook of the national Congress activities, serving as official consultants in place of their every day role as civil servants. Clearly the union or interest group pattern overlapped each other and also the parallel Congress/Committee structure. They could be represented simultaneously by a voting delegate from the BPC and a non voting delegate from the union. Each citizen was automatically a member of the BPC in a geographical sense regardless of occupation. Of course at that level of involvement, nothing precluded the individual from expressing and defending their own professional interests within the BPC. It was assumed this would happen within the context of a "useful" consultative role.

All of these structures climaxed with the national Congress (GPC), an approximate 1,000-member body empowered to study, debate, make laws, consider reports on the national budget, and decide questions of war, peace, and treaties. All programs were expected to flow from the decisions of the national Congress and serve as guidelines for the bureaucracy to implement.

Evaluation and Conclusions

Quadhafi certainly felt he had dispensed with a western-style legislature
(even though the national Congress performed exactly like one) and a political party system. For him, the DAOP pyramidal structure precluded the influence or predominance of the society by any single individual, party, class or interest, having been turned into a mass political participation organization and process. Safety apparently inhered in numbers, levels of organization, and the representation/participation functions of the broad citizenry. The outcome seemed to dictate a triumph of "direct democracy," or at a minimum, a national infrastructure conducive to such a purpose of popular involvement.

Significantly and somewhat defensively, Quadhafi has maintained that the DAOP innovation is in its preliminary stages, really awaiting his subsequent perceptions of the emerging Libyan society and its needs. Quadhafi's belief that he has truly innovated something entirely new, even for the Islamic world, can of course be challenged. Pakistan under Ayub Khan in its post-independence efforts at democratizing introduced an analogous "panchayat" grass-roots movement, subsequently failing too.

Certainly the view of having overcome imported political institutions and ideas reflects both Quadhafi's naivete and some definite slight-of-hand techniques. Changing agency names and providing a covering vocabulary for this doesn't alter the substantive nature of the actual power pyramid, consistently elitist in each of his efforts. A comparison of the ASU and DAOP experiments will confirm the gross similarities despite the use of different language.

The thrust of this constant innovation seems to indicate that a nation is being subjected to a political philosophical excursion (and its implementation) by a young revolutionary hero and his associates who have been previously unexposed to the mainstream and range of competitive ideas in both the western and eastern worlds of the past. By trial and error they are supposedly undergoing a political sophistication, but the progression remains questionable, because the starting place may have been so far back in time, that the Libyan revolution has so much to cover as yet.

There is considerable evidence of Quadhafi's commitment to his philosophical conceptualization and the political process of implementation, whether anticipated in every respect initially or not. The fact that he has insisted on each stage's implementation, as seen over the course of more than the last ten years, in Libyan embassy seizures and takeovers abroad, and recently in the DAOP application to the PLO presence in Libya proper, is confirmation.

The only possible redeeming view of DAOP may be seen as a transitional stage from military rule to civilian rule, but then strong supporting evidences would have to surface that a self-liquidation process is under way for the old RCC members and that Quadhafi is prepared to step down. So far the entire process of political conceptualization and implementation has only seen the shifting of the chairs of power but not the personnel who sit in these chairs. Ideological statements and abstractionism are not substitutes
for realities of deeds and actions. The goal of consensus remains as elusive as when Quadhafi first began his quest.

NOTES

2 Ibid., p. 179.
6 Ibid., pp. 181–183.
7 Ibid., p. 183.
8 Ibid., pp. 183, 244.
16 The Government-in-Exile for the FLN (Algeria) was resident in Cairo under the leadership of Ben Bella and Ferhat Abbas.
17 Shaked, op. cit., p. 337.
18 Ibid., p. 338.
19 Mansfield, op. cit., p. 461.
22 Polk, loc. cit., p. 245.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., P. 340.
30 Ibid., p. 341.
33 Article 18 of the Libyan ASU Charter.
36 Ibid., p. 282.
37 Habib, op. cit., p. 186.
38 Habib's book presents this as a central thesis of the regime.
41 Habib, op. cit., p. 185.
43 See notes numbers 31, 36, 37.
45 Muammar al-Quadhafi, the Green Book: The Solution of the Problem of Democracy.

2. CQ, loc. cit., p. 144; Mansfield, loc. cit., p. 462.
6. Ibid., pp. 463, 466, 552; Raymond Habiby “Quadhafi’s Thoughts on True Democracy,” Middle East Review (Summer, 1978), 29-30.
7. First, loc. cit., p. 137; Habiby’s “Thoughts,” 29.
10. Ibid., p. 464.
13. CQ, loc. cit., p. 144.
15. Ibid; The Human March in the Libyan Arab Republic (Tripoli: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January, 1976).
16. Quadhafi, op. cit.; Fallaci, loc. cit.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
26. Special Report, loc. cit.; Habiby’s “Thoughts,” loc. cit., p. 34.
27. Ibid.